

## DEVELOPING A NEW REFERENCE MODEL: SCOPE OF WORK

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### Project Description

The State Library will initiate a project to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of information access for Californians. This project will focus on specific components that make up the current structure for question answering. The specific components are:

- The “reference referral” structure and protocol that enables a question that cannot be handled at the local public library to be referred to a reference center that has the resources to answer the question. Presently, questions are referred from a local public library system to its regional CLSA reference center.
- Virtual reference, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (24/7). AskNow is currently California’s 24/7 service. This is available directly to the public as a link on the web pages of CA public libraries.
- Selected specialized databases for the question answering for complicated or detailed question answering. The regional CLSA reference centers and AskNow librarians use the Los Angeles Public Library’s *First Source* databases. There may be other specialized databases that should be factored into the question answering equation.

The way information consumers are communicating and accessing information is changing and the reference model must change with it. However, it is important to plant a new stake for statewide reference, knowing that the model we are about to design won’t be the last.

### Background

The current “model” of reference is based on a two-tiered structure of local public library and second level CLSA reference centers. Questions are referred from the local level to second level, as needed.

In recent years, the virtual reference service, AskNow, has been added to the question-answering equation. The State Library has supported the development of a virtual model in California with LSTA funds. AskNow is the statewide question-answering network of librarians who answer online questions directly from the public. It is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is coordinated by MCLS. AskNow uses the OCLC software Question Point. The State Library grants LSTA funds to MCLS to subscribe to Question Point on behalf of California public libraries.

Some CLSA system reference centers variously subscribe to online databases for their reference center staff and member libraries. First Source is a subset of commercial databases and specialized local digital files of the Los Angeles Public Library. The LAPL makes First Source available to the CLSA system reference centers. The State Library allocates LSTA funds of \$300,000 to 400,000 for First Source.

### Nelson/Mayo Report

After conducting focus groups on local and second level reference services in California (July 2005), consultants Sandra Nelson and Diane Mayo recommended the merger of all of the existing second level question answering functions into one or two locations as soon as possible. They based their recommendations on five trends that emerged from the nearly two hundred librarians in attendance:

- the changes in how the public accesses information as the result of the dynamic technology
- libraries are generally behind the public in applying popular technology
- second level reference service model isn't relevant to many of today's information consumers who want immediate and direct access to information
- in many public libraries the demand for reference service is decreasing
- library staff feel the need for training to be able to effectively use electronic information sources

### **A New Model**

State Library leaders believe that reference service as originally conceived by CLSA is no longer relevant and that the library community wants a new model. They "believe there is a consensus that second level reference should be delivered virtually, possibly from one single service point or at least from one unified service structure" (S. Hildreth, May 2006 Public Library Directors meeting paper).

They want to build on the best elements of the current structure for question handling and improve upon it. They would like that model to include a statewide virtual reference component that can be directly accessed by the public. They want the public to have a convenient point of access to information, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (24/7), and reliable and timely information from that source. They want local public libraries to have recourse to expert question-handling when needed. They believe that there needs to be a "top level", a point of last resort for public libraries for question-answering.

### **Specifications**

- Efficient and cost effective
- It should be a statewide reference model: keep it open as to how it is delivered
- For California residents
- As flexible as possible, to lend itself to the dynamic technology and public response to it

- Something the public sees as an extension of their local public library: (i.e., must have a library card to use it)
- Suited to the information consumer of today and tomorrow
- Available through a variety of mediums (e.g. instant messaging, white board, telephone)
- Strong delivery component
- Sustainable system of information delivery
- Access and referral protocols that will work in today's world

## **Funding a New Reference Model**

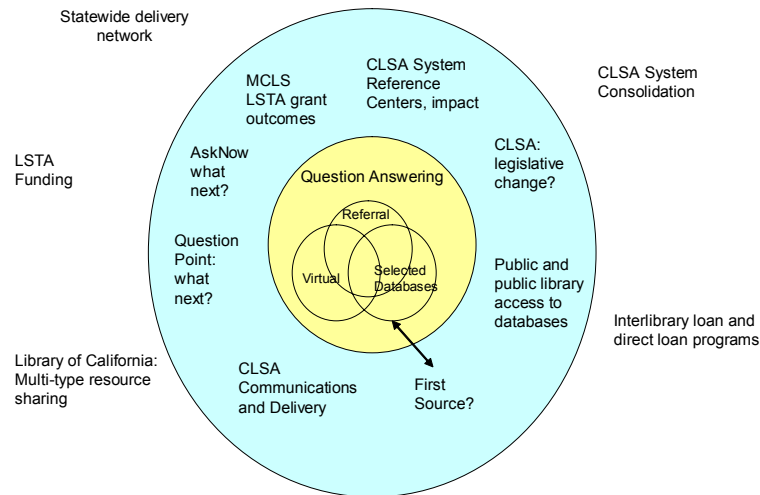
The CLSA systems currently receive \$1.287 million in state funding for reference services. We do not know precisely how much of this funding is allocated specifically to the question-answering function. The CLSA statewide reference component, though currently unfunded, may eventually be the vehicle for funding some or the entire new reference model. Whether or not CLSA funds for the reference component can be used to fund the new model is under review. LSTA funds may be the source of funding for development, start-up, and demonstration of the new model elements. The scope of work for this project will include answering these questions:

- What might be the cost of a new model of question answering?
- What are CLSA systems spending on question-handling?
- What are CLSA reference allocations paying for besides question-answering?
- Can any CLSA funds be used to fund the new question-answering model in whole or in part?
- What impact would this have on CLSA systems?
- How can this be sequenced appropriately with the consolidation of systems and redefining of resource sharing?
- Will LSTA funds be needed to fund a new question-answering model?
- Could LSTA funds be used to transition CLSA system evolution and CLSA funds for a statewide question-answering program?
- When, over what period of time, and how much LSTA funding would be needed for the development of the model?
- When, over what period of time, and how much LSTA funding would be needed for transitioning CLSA systems' evolution?
- CLSA Legislation
  - Will remodeling reference require changes in legislation?
  - What are the risks?
  - What are the possibilities?

## **Related Issues**

Several related issues must be taken into account as the "new reference model" is designed. Except as noted, they are not within the scope of work for this project; however, they are part of the context. This project may provide information or influence the direction of work related to these issues. The following schematic illustrates the relationship between these issues and the project to develop a new reference model.

## “Reference” in Context of Resource Sharing Discussion



### Resource Sharing Discussion

The State Librarian has called for a discussion of public library resource sharing and cooperative services in California. Resource sharing refers to those systems and services in the state that enable Californians to have access to the information resources beyond their public libraries. The call to revisit California’s public library resource sharing structures and systems comes from recognizing that technology and the way people are accessing information is changing. We must be responsive to those changes. We want the public library to keep pace with the information needs of today’s information consumers.

The discussion began with focus groups on the CLSA cooperative systems (December 2005) and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> level public library reference service (2004, 2005). The system consolidation process is being jointly examined by four Bay Area systems, with the assistance of Maureen Sullivan. The design of a new reference model is about to begin.

These are important steps in the process of rethinking public library resource sharing. Invariably, this discussion will include other programs like interlibrary loan, direct loan, and delivery. While the focus of this project is not on these programs, they are part of the multi-faceted nature of resource sharing. Any treatment of reference necessarily touches on resource sharing.

Several studies and reports related to reference and resource sharing have occurred in recent years. They include:

- The Himmel & Wilson report, *Supporting Interlibrary Loan and Direct Loan Services in California's Multitype Library Environment*, January 2000
- Florence Mason ILL (and direct loan) Study 2003
  - Phase 1: Cost Funding Manual completed
  - Phases 2-4 (implementation phase through compensation) not funded
- MOBAC Report: Future of Reference Focus Group, Steve Coffman, July 19, 2004
- BALIS Report: The Role of Reference and Second-level Reference in Selected CLSA Systems in California: Preliminary Report, Gail McPartland, Nov. 2004
- Nelson/Mayo Reference forums and report, July 18-August 3, 2005
- CLSA System forums and report, Maureen Sullivan, 2005

### Impact on CLSA Systems

If the question-answering function of the CLSA systems is transferred to one or two statewide reference centers, the role of the CLSA systems will change. Maureen Sullivan facilitated focus groups on CLSA systems in 2005. The focus groups showed that some CLSA systems were interested in learning more about consolidation. At present, there are 8 administrations for 15 CLSA systems: 3 systems administer 7 through contractual agreements while five systems handle their own administration.

Subsequently, the State Library funded an LSTA grant to the Peninsula Library System for a system consolidation project in four San Francisco Bay area systems: BALIS, PLS, SVLS, and MOBAC. This LSTA-funded project will “test consolidation of systems and develop a process for moving toward a merger.” Consultant Maureen Sullivan is assisting the grantee. A condition of the LSTA award is that other cooperative systems will be invited to participate. The initial meeting of the participants occurred on August 15, 2006.

### AskNow

The key question for the “new reference model” project is whether or not AskNow will be the State’s choice for virtual reference. The State Library has invested money in the development of AskNow. However, the Nelson/Mayo report notes dissatisfaction with AskNow on the part of librarians at the focus groups.

Meanwhile, the State Library has awarded a FY2006-07 grant to the MCLS for the AskNow virtual reference service. The grant is the last in a 3-year State Library commitment to transition from locally developed software to the OCLC Question Point service. The grant amount is \$200,000. The project’s in-kind budget is \$1.092 million.

The FY 2006-07 LSTA-funded grant stipulates that the project principals will:

- provide reliable, mediated online 24/7 reference service (AskNow) including document delivery

- for 2006/07 only, OCLC will provide many of the tasks previously done by MCLS coordinator, at no additional cost; work with MCLS in marketing and training
- accomplish these objectives:
  - continue 24/7 reference services for California residents
  - develop a pricing model for a sustainable future AskNow services
  - develop a procedure for transitioning to the new service model, including establishing an AskNow Advisory Board

In return, OCLC provides discounted access to the service for all California 24/7 public libraries. The grant pays for the subscription to OCLC's QuestionPoint virtual reference software. As of now, this is the State Library's only remaining commitment to AskNow.

The "new reference model" project will assess the AskNow model as well as other models for virtual reference. In the meantime, however, the State Librarian must address the question of what if anything should be done regarding funding of AskNow after June 2007.

### Library of California

Multi-type library resource sharing under the Library of California legislation has never materialized. The Library of California Board replaced the CLSA Board and has a policy role regarding CLSA funding. Even without funding, some libraries have formed informal alliances that continue today. State Library staff has little hope that the state legislature will fund the Library of California. However, as the "new reference model" is developed, there may be expectation that the model should be multitype and the question may surface: are we ever going to try to get funding for multitype resource sharing?

### Databases

The Nelson/Mayo report recommended that the State Library plan to provide subsidized access to fee-based databases for libraries and the public on a statewide basis. Such planning is outside the scope of developing the "new reference model." However, it is in the scope of this project to assess the effectiveness and potential of *First Source* as a component of the new reference model as well alternatives.

The State Library subsidizes *First Source* with LSTA funds (\$300,000-\$400,000). First Source includes the commercial and local databases of the LAPL. There are 2 sets of First Source Databases:

- the site that the Reference Centers have access to:  
<http://www.1stsource.org/>
- the site that AskNow librarians have access to:  
<http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itweb/la247ref?id=socal247ref>

The fee-based services need authentication with a LAPL library card which CLSA reference centers and AskNow librarians have. According to a LAPL reference

spokesperson, some of the best databases are accessed through the LAPL webpage rather than *First Source*.

The State Library has also played a role in funding the Librarian's Internet Index (LII), including in FY 06/07. LII is a national resource and it is available to the public but is essentially a librarian's tool. It is in the scope of the "new reference model" to monitor the development of LII and to consider whether or not it is a possible component of top-level question answering.

## **Work Plan**

The work plan assumes that the client team and State Library resource group will provide assistance throughout the project. The work plan and timeline is summarized in the table below.

### Notice to the Library Community

Following the September 14<sup>th</sup> meeting with the Library of California Board and concurrent notice to the library community, the State Librarian will formally launch this project with a written announcement. The announcement would include the project scope, timeline, and the role of stakeholders.

### Project Consultant's Approach

The project consultant will take a direct and pragmatic approach to developing the new reference model. As an agent for the State Library, her goal will be to efficiently design an optimum model for statewide reference. The project will have four phases: start-up/preparation, fact-finding, design, and ramp up to implementation. The work plan and timeline is outlined below.

### Prepare, Start-up

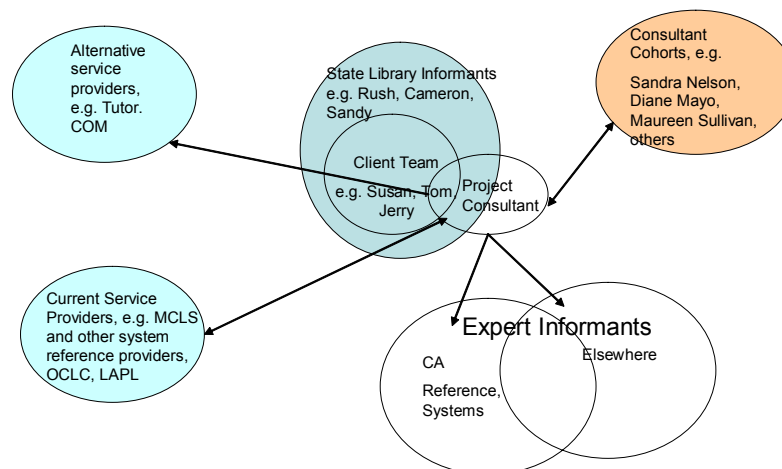
The project will begin with a client team work session in early October, following the September 14<sup>th</sup> Library of California Board meeting. At this session, the project consultant and client team will refine the scope of work, as needed, develop one or more "new model scenarios" as a point of departure, and finalize the groups with whom the project consultant will work over the following several months.

### Fact-finding and Design

The project consultant will do the fact-finding and design phases in consultation with four main resource groups: a) the client team and State Library informants, b) consultant cohorts, c) expert informants, and d) current and alternative service providers. The following narrative describes each group's purpose and makeup. The schematic below illustrates the group relationships.

- The client team will consist of Susan Hildreth, Tom Andersen, and Gerry Maginnity. State Library staff, including Rushton Brandis, Cameron Robertson, and Sandy Habbestad will be in-house key informants, along with others the client team suggests.
- The consultant cohorts will include experts known by the project consultant to have relevant expertise, exposure to reference best practices, and as needed, knowledge of California reference structure, CLSA systems, and library and information technology. Individually, they will be paid, at-will resources for the project consultant. Individually or collectively, they may be a think-tank for designing and critiquing scenarios.
- Expert informants will be individuals knowledgeable about reference structure, virtual reference, and databases in California. Individuals from other states with expertise in these elements will also be consulted. The project consultant will begin an initial list with the client team; the list will expand as the project unfolds.
- The service providers will include representatives of both current and alternative providers. For example, the project consultant will confer with MCLS and selected other CLSA system reference centers, OCLC, and LAPL representatives in the fact-finding and design phases. Likewise, the consultant will seek out and confer with alternative service providers.

## Reference Model: Fact-finding and Design Resource Groups



Throughout the fact-finding and design phases, the project consultant will regularly brief the client team by telephone and email. As needed, the project consultant will request and facilitate additional work sessions in Sacramento. The project consultant will confer with individuals in the resource groups in order to review and hone the developing



model. The optimum model with costs will be presented to the client team by the end of March 2007. In a work session to review and discuss the model, the project consultant will also facilitate an implementation schedule with the client team.

### Ramp Up to Implementation

In the final phase of work, the project consultant will help the client team think through and prepare for implementation. The consultant's assistance will take the form of conferring with the client team and State Library service providers, clarifying service specifications and content for contractual agreements, and helping craft a communication plan for the library community.

Timeline	Phase	Activity	Work Plan and Timeline			
Oct-06	Prepare	work session with Client Team				
		Client lead team: Susan, Tom, Gerry				
		Refine parameters				
		Make Expert Informants List				
		Make Current and Alternative Providers lists				
		End user communication plan				
		Set up Consultant Cohort Contacts				
		Initial scenario development				
		CLA presentation game plan				
Nov-Feb	Fact-finding	Best practices research				
		Current Service Provider Interviews, e.g.				
		Understand AskNow shortcomings				
		AskNow and OCLC Question Point status				
		MCLS AskNow LSTA grant outcomes				
		CLSA System Reference Services and Costs				
		Alternative Service Provider Interviews, e.g.				
		Alternatives to AskNow for virtual reference				
		LAPL interest in providing last resort reference				
		Confer with design groups				
		Consultant Cohort, Expert Informants,				
		Current and Alternative Service Providers				
Feb-March	Design	Develop optimum model scenario and cost draft				
		Review with stakeholders:				
		identify design gaps, consequences				
		Check back w/selected resource people/				
		troubleshoot design problems				
		Refine design				
March-June	Ramp-up to Implementation	Work session to develop implementation timeline				
		Assist CSL staff with service specifications				
		Develop specifications for Contractual agreements				